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ABSTRACT

Since staff are a key element in adult literacy programs, this document outlines requirements and actions for effective administrative and instructional personnel for such programs. Addressing first administrative personnel and then instructional personnel, the paper describes skill and knowledge requirements, and recommends actions to be taken with respect to recruitment and selection, preservice training, and staff development. Twenty-four references conclude the document. (SR)

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ENSURING COMPETENT STAFF IN ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMS

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Staff (both salaried and volunteer) are a key element in any adult literacy program. But many administrative and instructional personnel are lacking in the subject-matter knowledge, management skills, and/or other skills for establishing a supportive, failure-free environment. This paper will describe the skill and knowledge requirements for effective administrative and instructional personnel and recommend actions that need to be taken with respect to recruitment and selection, preservice training, and staff development to ensure that personnel are qualified and have capabilities that are matched to the needs of the learner population. Recognizing that many partnerships are now developing in which both salaried and volunteer personnel are involved, the following recommendations are meant to apply to each type of personnel.

Administrative Personnel

Skill and Knowledge Requirements

The salaried and/or volunteer adult literacy administrator must demonstrate the ability to:

- Assemble and retain paid and/or volunteer faculty and staff who are committed to the cause and needs of adult basic education.
- Coordinate and communicate with staff ably; maintain constructive relationships with colleagues and co-workers.
- Ensure the implementation of efficient policies.
- Handle budget planning and management accurately and efficiently.
- Initiate appropriate recordkeeping procedures and maintain accurate records.
- Develop successful ongoing staff development programs.
- Guide instructors to master targeted skills.

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- Maintain high morale among staff.
- Respond to change in schools and in the workplace.
- Maintain proper facilities.
- Remain flexible, patient, good humored, and alert in the face of the myriad demands that arise in the daily functioning of the typical adult basic education program.
- Provide a curriculum and program that can meet the needs of a broad array of adult learners including unemployed youth, English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, adults who are employed but who need some help with reading and math, the mentally handicapped, those who have no literacy or numeracy skills, and those who wish to get a General Educational Development (GED) diploma.
- Support the incorporation of diagnostic teaching principles in adult basic education classes. (Individualization of instruction, achieved through adherence to such diagnostic principles, may be conducted in individual, small-group, and sometimes large-group instruction, depending upon the needs of the group. Administrators should facilitate the implementation of such diagnostic instruction.)
- Select curricular strategies and resources consonant with the research base available in the field at a given time.
- Incorporate a work-oriented curriculum as appropriate.
- Evaluate learner and program effectiveness.
- Recruit adult learners from a wide spectrum of potential clients.
- Build partnerships with local community organizations in order to identify potential clients, raise funds, and enlist volunteer support.
- Overcome the animosity held by some adult illiterates toward educational professionals and people outside their community.
- Assign students to appropriate classes and see that they progress in an appropriate sequence.
- Develop a management system for handling the erratic attendance of many adult learners.

- Communicate well with the public.
- Build links with social agencies and organizations based in the communities of the hard-core illiterate.
- Handle publicity with all branches of the media.

Recruitment and Selection Requirements

The salaried and/or volunteer adult literacy administrator should:

- Have demonstrated success in some aspect of adult basic education administration or teaching--or both--for at least one year.

or

- Have demonstrated success in some aspect of educational administration or teaching, have demonstrated empathy for the needs of the adult basic education learner, and have observed in successful adult programs for at least 100 hours.
- Have at least six hours of coursework in the teaching of reading with special emphasis on adult literacy; six hours of instruction in teaching ESL; one course in computer literacy; appropriate coursework in adult education including, but not limited to, work in evaluation, administration, business management and finance, personnel, human development, and school law; and an internship in adult education.
- Have demonstrated good organizational skills, flexibility, good humor, creativity, and alertness to remaining buoyant in the face of horrendous client problems.
- Have had experience or training in fundraising from both large and small givers within and beyond the community.

Preservice Training

Preservice training for administrators can take many forms as long as it assures a broad array of skills and abilities. Training should include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Observations of a wide variety of successful adult basic education classes.

- Successful tutoring or teaching of adult learners.

- Completion of a successful administrative internship with a recognized leader in the field of adult basic education. Such leaders should be selected by colleagues and recognized for their time and effort by special stipends.

- Experience in developing community cooperation.

- Completion of nine hours of coursework in the teaching of reading (diagnosis, remediation, and practicum--with emphasis on adult education).

- Completion of six hours in adult education including, but not limited to, administration, proposal writing, and/or evaluation.

- Completion of six hours in linguistics--with emphasis on curricular implications of linguistics and practicum.

- Successful experience in program development and in educational evaluation.

- Demonstration of a commitment to a total process approach to educating the adult new reader that includes:

  - demonstrated awareness of the community, curriculum, and concepts necessary for adult basic education.

  - collection and categorization of the characteristics of adult learners crucial for decisionmaking in instruction.

  - writing of appropriate broad goals and supporting objectives for adult learners.

  - planning of the assessment of objectives that take into consideration the needs of adult learners.

  - planning of strategies, resources, and organization appropriate to adult learners.

  - integration of the total instructional package to respond appropriately to learner characteristics.

  - implementation of the plan with adult learners.

  - evaluation of both program and learner progress--program evaluation having to do with

objective, strategy, resource, and organizational decisions, learner evaluation having to do with learner progress toward specified goals.

- revision, rethinking, rewriting, and redoing of all decision areas as needed.

Staff Development

Administrative personnel should have responsibility for staff development including:

- Recruitment of preservice and inservice personnel who are knowledgeable and appropriately trained to teach in adult literacy programs.
- Assistance in the provision of inservice training to keep staff apprised of latest developments in the field.

Instructional Personnel

Skill and Knowledge Requirements

Instructional personnel in adult literacy programs often have very broad demands placed upon them. It is necessary, therefore, that they have skills and knowledges related to education generally, as well as to adult basic education specifically. The general and specific requirements are as follows:

General Requirements

- To demonstrate proficiency in evaluating and implementing research findings.
- To demonstrate a willingness to make a meaningful contribution to professional organizations related to adult literacy.
- To demonstrate a willingness to assume leadership in improving adult literacy programs.
- To demonstrate awareness of the community, curriculum, and concepts necessary for adult basic education.

Specific Requirements

- To demonstrate the ability to collect and categorize diagnostic information on the adult

learner, including strengths and weaknesses, into the four major categories of sociocultural, physiological, psychological, and educational in order to make crucial instructional decisions. (The instructor in adult literacy must be the consummate diagnostician in order to cope successfully with the broad range of client characteristics normally present in an adult literacy situation.)

- To develop appropriate broad goals and supporting objectives for adult learners.
- To plan assessment of objectives that take into consideration the needs of adult learners.
- To plan strategies, resources (including work-oriented materials), and organization (concerns having to do with time, place, and people) for achieving the selected objectives that are appropriate for the adult learner.
- To integrate the total instructional package prior to instruction in such a way that it takes into account learner characteristics.
- To implement the total plan successfully with adult learners.
- To evaluate both program and learner progress--program evaluation having to do with objective, strategy, resource, and organizational decisions, learner evaluation having to do with learner progress toward specified goals.
- To revise, rethink, rewrite, and redo decision areas (objectives, strategies, organization, and resources) as needed.

Recruitment and Selection Requirements

The salaried and/or volunteer adult literacy instructor should:

- Have completed at least 24 hours of successful (2.8 or above on a 4.0 scale) adult literacy related coursework.

or

- Have demonstrated success in adult literacy instruction.

or

- Have demonstrated success in some related areas of teaching and be able to demonstrate that efforts are underway to engage in formal instruction in adult literacy.

- Display willingness to participate in appropriate staff development.

Preservice Training

The possibility of truly effective preservice training for adult literacy instructors is still remote given the paucity of adult education courses that speak directly to the requirements outlined in this paper. Given the availability of such courses, training for adult literacy instructors at the Master's level from an accredited institution should include, but not be limited to:

- Observations of successful adult literacy instruction--live if possible, simulated if necessary.

- Completion of nine hours of coursework in reading focused on adult literacy: diagnosis (3), practicum (3), internship (3).

- Completion of a minimum of one year of successful, supervised teaching or tutoring in adult literacy (may be part of the nine hours of coursework specified above).

- Completion of a minimum of 15 additional hours to be selected from the following areas: adult education (6), inquiry/evaluation (3), applied linguistics (6), and computer science (3).

- Fulfillment of the remaining portion of the program from related areas of study as required by a given institution.

Staff Development

Generally, staff development refers to a process that promotes professional preparation and growth of the people involved in a program. Such preparation may range from coursework to conferences and may take place either before or during teacher, tutor, or volunteer involvement in a program (Zinn, 1975).

A major issue surrounding staff development, examined in the 1960's in the Greenleigh Associates (1966) study, was how much training at which level was needed in order to be a good Adult Basic Education (ABE) instructor. The finding that number of years of training or degree of certification was not significant was controversial at the time and still raises debatable issues. Enthusiastic,

committed, understanding high-school graduates, who may have recently completed their own GEDs, appeared to be as effective as certificated teachers. This should not seem surprising, however, especially since in the 1960's ABE was just getting its feet on the ground.

Then (and, unfortunately, sometimes now) daytime teachers were often given the ABE classes to teach as a kind of bonus--the only way the system could provide extra money to a teacher. Given the best circumstances, the situation was untenable. The teachers came from teaching all day, had little or no preparation time, and little commitment to or interest in exploring means of reaching this special group of students. Little wonder that the results of such teaching would indicate that a rested, enthusiastic, committed high-school graduate, possibly with many years of experience, might do a better job than a certificated teacher.

So, given that staff members may, for years to come, bring a wide variety of background preparation and experience to the task of teaching the adult learner, and given that they will undoubtedly be asked to continue to teach ABE learners with an equally broad range of needs, what are the most effective means of training them for the positions they will assume?

- Teachers and administrators must communicate so that common training needs may be identified and personnel identified who can solve these needs.

- Those conducting the training must cooperate and collaborate with administration and staff to tailor their presentations to fulfill the needs of the client in practical, cost-effective ways. For preservice teachers, this means beginning with an assessment of client needs, training to equip the client with needed formal skills, and monitoring to assure that the trainee is properly placed. For the inservice teacher, it demands that the learner (in this case the teacher or volunteer) be provided instruction that promotes continual growth and job efficiency. Such training can often best be provided after the trainee has been on the job long enough to guarantee that the inservice experience builds on need rather than on administrative zeal or fashionable sales pitch.

- The training should be provided over appropriate time spans to allow learning to be meaningful and long lasting and should be planned to accommodate teacher and volunteer schedules.

- Staff development resources should draw upon a wide array of personnel: state departments, colleges and universities, and local program administrators and supervisors, as well as other specialized support staff in materials production, counseling, testing, reading, and recruitment. Creative use of community

personnel can not only provide the immediate staff with sound experiences, but may also link them and their students with valuable contacts.

- Coursework may be given for credit or not--depending on the needs and interests of the teachers and volunteers. Many colleges and universities are becoming more flexible and creative in their course offerings. Again, the decision as to how to provide on-the-job staff development must be a decision left to the local program. However, extension courses, offered on or off campus, may solve some of the inservice training needs.

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